

**Joint Legislative Oversight Committee for Health & Human Services, Oct. 11, 2011**  
**Linda Piper, Executive Director, NC Licensed Child Care Association**

I am Linda Piper, Executive Director of the North Carolina Licensed Child Care Association. I came to this organization as a provider – as a second-generation provider, in fact. My mother and I owned and operated two 4-star centers in Wilson County. We cared for approximately 350 children before we sold our last center five years ago.

Now my role is to lead this association as it serves as a liaison, resource and advocate for private child care providers. We have over 400 centers in our membership. Our member centers, on average, are licensed for 122 children each. We have faith-based programs, Head Start programs, small family-owned sites and multi-state companies within our membership. More than just our members, however, we represent the voices of many others who are just starting to learn about our organization or simply have not discovered us yet.

In regard to NC Pre-K, some of our members do not have NC Pre-K classrooms. They are still a vital part of the conversation, however, because they are meeting child care and early education needs in their particular communities. It is also worth noting that just because some do not *currently* serve Pre-K children does *not* mean that they do not have the capacity to do so, or would not consider it in the future.

I believe that we are at a crossroads in child care and early education in our state, and many of our members agree based on what I am hearing from the field. Recent changes in the early childhood system, combined with today's economic realities and ongoing challenges in the industry, have led to a great deal of confusion and uncertainty. This confusion and uncertainty is bad for North Carolina children and families, bad for these small, medium and large-sized North Carolina businesses, and bad for our state's economy.

Our Association has hosted 17 meetings for private providers across the state in recent months, from East Flat Rock in Henderson county to down east in Greenville, to Taylorsville in Alexander County, to Fayetteville in the southeast, and all points in between ... Meetings such as these help ensure that our work continues to reflect the concerns and objectives of the providers that we serve. They enable me to share their valuable perspectives with you.

Here are some of the comments from private providers across the state:

- In Alamance, Davie, Franklin and many other counties, private providers have lost "slots" [funding for children] and seen local NC Pre-K committees lower their reimbursement rates while at the same time mandating higher salaries.
- In some counties, there is a single portal available for all NC Pre-K applicants where children are assessed and those found to be eligible are fairly assigned to the most appropriate sites. In other counties, there is no such local system or process, leaving private centers with NC Pre-K classrooms at a disadvantage and at the mercy of the public settings when this type of child-find method is used.

- New Hanover County and Mecklenburg County providers feel the public school systems, through the local NC Pre-K committees, are controlling the program to their advantage without allowing Smart Start or private providers to have a voice. (Examples include reducing slots in private centers, prioritizing public school slots when placing eligible children, and busing children longer distances than necessary.)
- Some communities have access to start-up dollars and tuition assistance programs that help staff continue their education, but not all communities. Similarly, some communities, but not all, require that private providers offer transportation to and from home.
- Some counties recognize “at-risk” children who are enrolled in 4- and 5-star program through subsidy as being served, while other counties will pull children from a 3-, 4-, or 5- star center and move them to another center’s Pre-K classroom, creating an unnecessary transition in order to fill the Pre-K slots.
- We *frequently* hear that Head Start children are utilizing dollars and taking up Pre-K slots that could be filled by children who are currently unserved.
- Private providers are frustrated about what they perceive as a disconnect between decision-makers and implementers in Raleigh and on local committees and those on the frontlines delivering care. They desire an effective, recognized channel through which to offer suggestions for improvements and efficiencies and raise the alarm when unintended consequences negatively impact their centers, families and communities.
- Private providers *do* have the capacity to serve additional four-year-olds, and many are interested in doing so.

As North Carolina moves forward in the child care and early education arena, the decisions made by the General Assembly and others – such as DCDEE – will have significant bearing on the extent to which our state’s broad network of high-quality private child care centers will serve as an NC Pre-K partner. I encourage you to utilize NCLCCA providers to assist you in your deliberations and decision-making, and also encourage you to stop by and visit with the private providers in your districts.

For decades we have been serving at-risk children of all ages, along with their families, through the subsidy reimbursement system. We look forward to continuing to serve more children, improve student outcomes and strengthen our economy. We don’t claim to have all the answers, but we are eager to be part of the discussion. Thank you for having us here today to start this very important dialogue.

Next, I hope you will be able to hear from Kevin Campbell, who is a private provider in Mecklenburg County. He has information to share with you about placement of Pre-K children *this year* that I know is going to surprise and interest you.